



DETERMINATION
AGILITY
RESOLUTION

FINAL REPORT

Victoria Cool Aid Society
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Audit

June 2021

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VICTORIA COOL AID SOCIETY - DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION AUDIT

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

VICTORIA COOL AID SOCIETY engaged an external consulting firm, ADR Education in partnership with Rainwatch Advising, to conduct an independent audit of Cool Aid's diversity, equity and inclusion culture and recommend a course of action for positive change and leadership in these areas. The purpose of this audit was to inform a course of action for Cool Aid to be more supportive of and responsive to the unique challenges faced by staff who are Indigenous, Black, People of Colour (POC), or members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, as well as improve Cool Aid's efforts to implement reconciliation initiatives and achieve progress on its goal to indigenize the organization.

The independent audit team (the audit team) designed a process to engage Cool Aid staff and conduct a review of Cool Aid's policies, practices, and workplace environment to make informed recommendations about how Cool Aid can foster an inclusive and diverse workplace culture. All information gathered through the audit was treated as private and kept strictly confidential. The audit team ensured that all information received during the process was without attribution (i.e., names or other personal identifiers are not present in the data pool, or in this report).

The purpose of this report is to outline our approach to conducting this organizational audit, to acknowledge Cool Aid's espoused values in regard to diversity, equity and inclusion, to share the audit team's analysis and themes and provide recommendations for accomplishing the organization's objectives.

AUDIT PROCESS

The Audit was initiated in February 2021 and included three phases:

- *Phase 1| Initial Design (Completed February 2021)*
- *Phase 2| Data Collection (Completed May 2021)*
- *Phase 3| Assessment and Reporting (Completed June 2021)*

THEMES

Based on the perspectives and feedback generated from the interview-conversations, the audit team identified seven main themes which are described as:

1. Commitment to the Work and Recognition of Limitations
2. Uneven Organizational Expansion and Its Impacts
3. Ambiguity/Uncertainty of Goals and Initiatives

- *Indigenization*
- 4. Lack of Diversity Among Staff and Leadership
 - *Recruitment and Retention*
 - *Resistance and Defensiveness to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*
 - *Microaggressions*
- 5. Bigoted Abuse from Clients/ Tenants
- 6. Conflict Resolution and Organizational Policies
 - *Conflict Resolution in Cool Aid*
 - *Policy*
- 7. Indigenous Cultural Advisor and Manager, Indigenous Education and Program Development Positions

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered as ideas and strategies to address the main themes (and underlying interests and values) that were identified during the audit.

1. Establish clarity and concreteness on what the organization is trying to do and why (i.e., what is its core mission and operational objectives).
2. Retain the services of an external consultant (qualified resource) to support the implementation of decolonization and anti-racism initiatives and related projects.
3. Implement a targeted hiring strategy with associated best practices to enhance employee diversity and promote inclusion.
4. Use the values of diversity and inclusion to promote and brand Cool Aid's organizational identity.
5. Create on-going forums for dialogue on issues of diversity and inclusion.
 - *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee*
6. Implement standardized training and learning for leadership and staff.
7. Conduct policy reviews - and implement revisions as required - with respect to:
 - *Hiring and recruitment*
 - *Conflict resolution*
 - *Verbal Abuse from client/ tenants*

- *Adjust name protocols in internal systems/ software to avoid deadnaming*

1. INTRODUCTION

VICTORIA COOL AID SOCIETY engaged an external consulting firm, ADR Education in partnership with Rainwatch Advising, to conduct an audit of Cool Aid's diversity, equity and inclusion culture and recommend a course of action for positive change and leadership in these areas. Cool Aid staff perform essential work to serve people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. To be successful in their work, staff need to be supported by a healthy and inclusive workplace that respects and reflects the diverse identities of individual staff and clients. The purpose of this audit was to understand the current workplace experience for staff, and inform a course of action for Cool Aid to be more supportive of and responsive to the unique challenges faced by staff who are Indigenous, Black, POC, or members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, as well as improve Cool Aid's efforts to implement reconciliation initiatives and achieve progress on its goal to Indigenize the organization.

ADR Education is a national conflict engagement and capacity development Firm that specializes in supporting organizational growth and improvement. The Firm's approach to conducting workplace audits rests on the belief that learning about workplace culture and dynamics is best achieved by engaging stakeholders in storytelling. An audit is therefore a means to explore people's **perceptions and experiences** rather than evaluate or judge them. To bring about positive change to any working environment, it is essential that the stakeholders are the agents of that change. Hence, a workplace audit should focus on discovering the ways people can inform and effectively participate in addressing the particular issues in their workplace. The objective is to identify what is positively contributing to workplace functionality and health, while also identifying problems (i.e., opportunities for change) and exploring ideas for addressing and resolving them. Mallorie Nicholson and Jessica McNamara, from ADR Education, were members of the audit team.

The third member of the audit team was Sarah Robinson, Principal at Rainwatch Advising. After a long and courageous battle with cancer, Sarah heartbreakingly and unexpectedly passed away in the last weeks of this project. Sarah was a proud citizen of the Fort Nelson First Nation and the Saulneau First Nation in Treaty 8 territory. She was married into the Toquaht Nation and lived in their small village of Macoah on the west-coast of Vancouver Island; she was a proud wife, daughter, sister, stepmom and auntie. Over the course of her young life, Sarah provided support to many organizations in BC and across Canada, and was a powerful advocate and leader on Indigenous issues and reconciliation. Her greatest impact was as an educator. Her charisma and ability to connect with people gave her the rare capacity to facilitate personal learning and growth when addressing tough and emotionally charged issues; People often found themselves changed by working with her, including us. ***We are deeply grateful for Sarah's work, wisdom and expertise on this project, and feel immensely privileged to have had her as a member of our team while we did.***

Finally, the audit team would also like to express their **sincere thanks and appreciation** to all those individuals who voluntarily took the time to meet and share their perspectives and insights. In total, roughly a third of all current employees and a number of past employees participated in this audit. Your willingness to speak openly about your views and experiences is gratefully acknowledged. In addition, your continued commitment to improve your working environment is both acknowledged and appreciated.

2. AUDIT APPROACH

The approach to this workplace audit was informed by a spirit of curiosity and a desire to improve Cool Aid's workplace environment. It was designed and conducted as an exploration of the organization's working culture ***from the perspectives of those who work in it***. It was not led or directed by Cool Aid's Leadership team and was not an investigation or fact-finding exercise of any kind. The audit team's job was not to critically determine the trustworthiness or factual accuracy of anything that was heard. On the contrary, the audit team was focused on capturing and reflecting the subjective experiences, feelings, and opinions of Cool Aid's workplace community. Doing so enabled the creation of *workplace culture narratives* which illuminated important organizational dynamics, positive workplace qualities, challenges, and opportunities for progressive change in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion at Cool Aid.

The audit team engaged directly with staff – on a voluntary basis via interview-conversations - to facilitate the telling of workplace culture narratives. This included identifying and reflecting on challenges and opportunities while being encouraged to contribute to the creation of a more functional (i.e., healthier and more inclusive) future-state. The objective was therefore to learn about Cool Aid's culture, particularly in regards to diversity, equity, inclusion and indigenization, rather than determine fault or ascribe blame.

All information gathered through the workplace audit was private and kept strictly confidential. The audit team ensured that all information received during the process was without attribution (i.e., names or other personal identifiers are not present in the data pool, or in this report). Audio recording was not used, and transcripts were not produced from the interview-conversations that took place during the course of the audit. This is in keeping with the primary objective of better understanding the contributing influences of workplace culture and functionality so they can be addressed and (if necessary) resolved or changed.

Given that this process was not an investigation nor was it intended to address specific workplace complaints, it is important to note that if anyone identified specific complaints or concerns related to bullying, harassment, discrimination and/or other alleged breaches of Cool Aid's policies, they were directed to Human Resources for advice and support. In addition, and predictably, during the interview-conversations the audit team occasionally heard participants' opinions about particular conflicts involving their co-workers. The themes that emerged from these interview-conversations are included in this report, but the audit team did not include comments or make specific references about individual staff, managers or departments. The audit team aimed to capture and reflect the subjective experiences, feelings, and opinions of Cool Aid staff. The information collected therefore represents the variety of experiences and perspectives shared by staff.

The audit team's approach was guided by five core principles:

1. **Transparency** – *To ensure that the purpose and methodology of the audit was clear, and the outcomes were shared with all participants at the same time.*
2. **Voluntary participation** – *To ensure that participants' contributions were obtained through free will and personal agency rather than proscribed or directed.*

3. **Confidentiality** - To ensure that individuals felt comfortable speaking freely without fear of being identified.
4. **Inclusivity** - To ensure that there was no attempt to hide information and all information was considered; The process was open to all employees, management and Board members who wanted to participate (some past employees participated as well).
5. **Independent, external reviewer**- To remove any perception of bias and strengthen the validity of the process' findings.

3. PROCESS

This Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Audit and Implementation Project included five phases.

PHASE 1 | INITIAL DESIGN

- Reviewed relevant organizational policies and documents
- Consulted Cool Aid leadership team to finalize scope, procedural approach, engagement methods etc.
- Drafted and submitted Preliminary Report

PHASE 2 | DATA COLLECTION

- Circulated introductory email to staff explaining the process and inviting participation
- Facilitated (2) process orientation and awareness meetings for Cool Aid staff
- Collected participant submissions through:
 - One-on-one virtual interview-conversations (primary method), and written submissions (secondary method)
- Confirmed that the information collected reflects the diversity of Cool Aid staff, and resolve any data gathering gaps (i.e., underrepresented perspectives)

PHASE 3 | ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

- Data collated and synthesized
- Qualitative (and limited quantitative) assessment of data identifying recurring themes
- Themes compared against relevant Cool Aid policies and procedures

- *Audit team agreed on key themes and analysis for the Final Report*
- *Final Report drafted and submitted that includes:*
 - *Baseline assessment of Cool Aid's current diversity and inclusion culture*
 - *Specific recommendations and an implementation plan to: support a culture of diversity and inclusion, become a structurally and culturally anti-racist organization, and decolonize and indigenize the organization*
 - *Best practice recommendations for the establishment and support of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee*

PHASE 4 | PRESENTATION OF THEMES, ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Final Report presented to Cool Aid leadership team and made available to all participants*

PHASE 5 | IMPLEMENTATION

- *Support the Cool Aid leadership team in developing an action plan to implement specific recommendations in order to support a culture of diversity and inclusion; one that assists Cool Aid in becoming structurally and culturally anti-racist, with emphasis on decolonizing and indigenizing the organization.*

4. ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was composed by considering and analyzing all the information shared during the data collection phase of the process. It frames the frequently raised perspectives of those interviewed and does not highlight isolated (i.e., infrequently mentioned) issues. The focus on frequently raised perspectives was balanced by the need to elevate the perspectives of POC and 2SLGBTQ+ staff at Cool Aid, whose experiences, and perspectives were of specific relevancy to this audit. Unattributable quotes are included to help express and contextualize the meanings associated with the different themes. The quotes reflect similar-type statements that were heard frequently and are sufficiently general so as not to identify the person quoted. In a few instances, quotes have been amended (i.e., paraphrased) to protect the identity of the speaker.

In terms of format, first, a summary of Cool Aid's espoused values is provided to set the context for describing and analyzing the main themes. Next, each of the main themes is summarized and briefly analyzed. In these summaries, terms like "many", "some", "generally", "most", or "a vast majority" will be used. Such terms are intended to give the reader an approximation of how broadly or narrowly a view or opinion was shared. Finally, a set of procedural recommendations are provided to address the themes and are intended to inform the development of an action plan.

5. REVIEW OF ESPOUSED VALUES

An important component of this audit is understanding Cool Aid's idea of its own identity and core values. This audit seeks to communicate Cool Aid's organizational culture and the experience of staff within that environment. To that end, it is useful to first understand Cool Aid's espoused values; that is, the values, principles and policies expressed on behalf of Cool Aid in regards to diversity, equity, inclusion and indigenization. By starting from an understanding of Cool Aid's espoused values, we can explore areas where those values are consistent with (or not) the experiences of Cool Aid staff, or conversely, areas where the values expressed in Cool Aid's statements, policies and procedures are not, or are inconsistently, enacted.

The audit team has reviewed relevant documents and policies that provide a picture of both what the organization seeks to be, and the structures (policies and procedures) put in place to achieve that. Reviewed documents include *Cool Aid's Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles*, *The Cool Aid Policies Manual* (with particular focus on its *Human Resources Chapter*), as well as a slide deck shared with the audit team on *Indigenization within Cool Aid*. Sections that are relevant to this Audit have been included below.

COOL AID MISSION, VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As an organization, Cool Aid is clear on its mission to serve clients experiencing homelessness. *The Cool Aid Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles* document outlines the key principles (values) that should inform all actions Cool Aid takes as an organization which includes several key principles that are relevant to this audit.

OUR MISSION

We act to end homelessness by working in partnership with others to develop community-based solutions. We are committed to working in a non-judgmental way with adults experiencing marginalization in Greater Victoria by advocating for and providing emergency shelter, supportive housing, integrated health care and other support services.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We...

- *Meet clients where they are at and see things from their point of view.*
- *Practice reliability, good faith, and integrity in all our relationships.*
- *Recognize and value the contributions of our clients, staff, volunteers, donors and partners.*
- *Embrace diversity and honour all cultures, identities and experiences.*
- *Cultivate partnerships to strengthen community.*

- *Foster an environment that promotes equity, well-being and safety for all.*
- *Advocate for those we serve.*
- *Support each other through change and innovation.*
- *Take responsibility for our actions and learn from our experiences.*

HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES - COOL AID POLICIES MANUAL

Cool Aid has an extensive policies manual, with relevant sections taken from the Human Resources chapter shown below. It includes relevant sections from the *'Respectful Workplace Policy,' 'Staff Rights and Responsibilities Policy,'* and *'Pilot Policy for Review and Discussion'* – which describes Cool Aid's Competency Model for Staff, of which the *'Culture and Diversity'* competency is of particular interest to this audit.

Respectful Workplace Policy

A respectful workplace is one that is healthy, safe, supportive and values diversity regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, physical traits, or age. It is a place where employees are valued; communication is polite and courteous; people are treated with respect; conflict is addressed in a positive and respectful manner; and disrespectful behaviour, bullying and harassment are addressed.

2. Definitions

"Respectful Workplace"

Respectful conduct involves supporting the physical, psychological, and social well-being of all employees. In a respectful workplace:

- *Everyone has a sense of belonging.*
- *Build effective working relationships regardless of role and responsibilities.*
- *Assume everybody has good intentions.*
- *Allow for mistakes.*
- *Listen when others have concerns.*
- *Employees are valued and we support each other's successes.*
- *We acknowledge and accommodate differences in needs, knowledge and ways of doing things.*
- *Communication is polite and courteous.*
- *People are treated as they wish to be treated, we believe in each other's positive intent.*

- *Conflict is addressed in a positive and respectful manner.*
- *Disrespectful behaviour and harassment are addressed; we all take action to make things better*

“Discriminatory Harassment”

Discriminatory harassment involves personal harassment based on biases against such personal characteristics as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, physical traits, or age. Human Rights legislation includes, but is not limited to:

- *Unwelcome remarks, jokes, innuendoes or taunting about a person’s racial or ethnic background, colour, and place of birth, age, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, ancestry or religion.*
- *Racist or bigoted ethnic pictures or materials.*

3. Roles

Manager and Supervisor Responsibilities

How can managers ensure a respectful workplace?

- *Model respectful behaviour.*
- *Recognize and value diversity in the workplace.*
- *Create an environment that supports the resolution of respectful workplace issues.*
- *Inform employees that the work environment is one based on respect.*
- *Orient all employees to the respectful workplace policy and other related policies.*
- *Educate and train all supervisors and employees regarding a respectful workplace.*
- *Monitor the workplace to ensure respectful behaviour is practiced.*
- *Recognize and address actions that offend, embarrass or humiliate others, whether deliberate or unintentional.*
- *Treat each situation as a serious matter.*
- *Manage the situation towards a resolution between the parties if possible, with a view to correcting behaviour and preserving long-term working relationships.*
- *Strategize against further incidents. Ensure there are no reprisals against employees making a complaint or participating in an investigation.*
- *Provide support to employees who are experiencing the effects of disrespectful behaviour.*
- *Consult with Human Resources if the situation cannot be resolved between the parties.*

Employee Responsibilities

How can employees ensure a respectful workplace?

- *Treat others with respect.*
- *Set an example by respecting the dignity and human rights of all employees, clients and members of the public.*
- *Refrain from actions that offend, embarrass or humiliate others, whether deliberate or unintentional.*
- *Raise disrespectful conduct with the employee displaying it or with a person in authority as soon as possible.*
- *If you witness disrespectful behaviour you may wish to approach the individuals involved.*
- *Please do not make allegations of disrespectful behaviour that are frivolous or vindictive.*
- *Make every effort to resolve respectful workplace issues, if comfortable, in an informal manner.*

Human Resources Responsibilities

- *Promote awareness of the Respectful Workplace policy.*
- *Assist management in the consistent application of the policy.*
- *Consult with and provide advice to management.*
- *Counsel employees on their rights and options.*
- *Receive complaints and ensure appropriate action is initiated.*
- *Conduct investigations as required.*

Staff Rights and Responsibilities Policy

Staff of the Society have all the rights guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, B.C. Human Rights Act, B.C. Government Employees and Services' Union Contract (where applicable), the workers compensation act of British Columbia, the Victoria Cool Aid Society Policy and Procedures Manual, and the following additional rights and associated responsibilities:

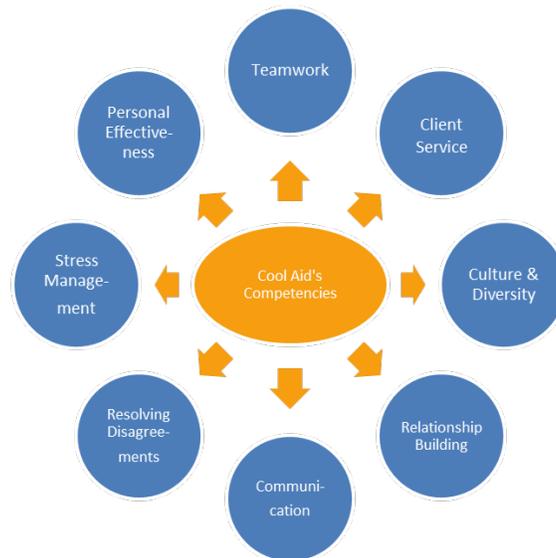
- *Staff have the right to the protection of privacy of personnel information, such as home address and telephone number.*
- *Staff have the right to safe working conditions.*
- *Staff have the responsibility to act quickly to protect their well-being, whether physical, mental/emotional, or spiritual well-being is threatened.*
- *Staff have the responsibility to follow policies procedures and guidelines outlined by the Society.*

- Staff have the right to respectful treatment by other staff at all times. Staff have the responsibility to treat others respectfully and to communicate courteously, clearly and assertively to another staff member when a disrespectful interaction is experienced.
- Staff have the right to regular supervisory feedback about performance and to have employment-related difficulties which they identify addressed as soon as possible. Staff have a responsibility to request and encourage feedback from supervisory staff and others in the pursuit of continued professional development and improved program delivery.
- The Society recognizes that staff may experience a full range of human emotion in the course of their work. Staff have the responsibility to express those emotions appropriately.

Pilot Process for Review and Discussion

Cool Aid's Competency Model

The eight competencies in Cool Aid's model (below) set out the key skills, behaviours and attitudes that are required for employees in all positions across the organization. They do not address the technical knowledge and skills required to work in specific program areas.



...Culture and Diversity

Definition: Demonstrates an open-minded approach to understanding people regardless of their gender, age, race, national origin, social class, religion, ethnicity, disability status, sexual orientation, or lived experience. Treats all people fairly and consistently, effectively working with people from diverse backgrounds by treating them with dignity and respect.

Behaviours:

- Has an awareness of own values and biases with respect to culture and diversity.
- Learns from individuals about their culture, values, needs, preferences and wishes

- *Adapts approach and uses appropriate engagement skills when interacting with culturally diverse populations.*
- *Demonstrates respect for the right of individuals to their customs, beliefs and practices.*
- *Shows an understanding of the power dynamics that affect cross-cultural interactions.*

INDIGENIZATION WITHIN COOL AID

For the last several years, Cool Aid has been taking steps to better serve their Indigenous clients. Some of these efforts, as well as a desired attitudinal shift for the organization were described in the presentation slide deck, “*Indigenization within Cool Aid.*”

Cool Aid’s Path

Cool Aid is committed to implementing recommendations from the TRC and has been on a path to Indigenize our organization for a number of years now. Our goals include:

- *Providing staff with education about the reality of Canada’s colonial history and how it continues to suppress/oppress Indigenous peoples*
- *Making staff aware of Indigenous worldviews and to respect those worldviews as equal to other views*
- *Identifying opportunities for indigeneity to be expressed both by staff and by clients*
- *Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and doing into our everyday practices and processes*
- *Ensuring Indigenous clients and tenants have access to cultural supports and opportunities*

What is Decolonization?

- *The removal or undoing of colonial elements*
- *It is about shifting the way Indigenous Peoples view themselves and the way non-Indigenous people view Indigenous Peoples*
- *Restores the Indigenous world view*
- *Restores culture and traditional ways*
- *Replaces Western interpretations of history with Indigenous perspectives of history*

6. THEMES

This section summarizes the main themes consistently identified by most audit participants. They represent the main subjects, issues and cultural dynamics revealed during data collection and analysis. The information was drawn out of the participant's workplace culture narratives and consist of ***people's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and impressions*** and are not a statement of fact. Based on the feedback received and what the audit team heard, the following themes were identified:

1. COMMITMENT TO THE WORK AND RECOGNITION OF LIMITATIONS

Although concerns were raised and will be addressed below, most interviewees expressed a commitment to do good for others and a genuine desire to be more inclusive. There is a strong sense of dedication to the work within the Cool Aid community that was expressed in almost every interview. Some words consistently used to describe people within the workplace included:

- *Resilient*
- *Caring*
- *Dedicated*
- *Supportive*
- *Non-judgemental*
- *Committed*
- *Compassionate*
- *Gritty*

Many participants reported that although there are difficulties within the organization, working relationships are generally professional, supportive, and courteous. A deep sense of commitment to the work, across all areas of Cool Aid serves as a unifying force among the community and provides a solid foundation for building a more diverse and inclusive working environment.

In addition, many participants expressed their perception that there is a genuine desire for a more diverse and inclusive workplace but recognized that "we don't know what we don't know."

"It feels like there is a genuine desire to do the right thing but how do you do it and what is the right thing?"

"I feel like people are trying to make a conscious effort to be inclusive but aren't really sure how to do it."

"This is generally a supportive work environment and I think the majority of people want a diverse and inclusive workplace, but what does that mean?"

“There are amazing people who work here and my sense is that most of them are striving to be better and more inclusive.”

“I think people here are committed to an inclusive and diverse workplace but they don’t know how to achieve it.”

“We want it but we don’t know what it means to embody an approach that embraces diversity, let alone indigenization.”

This theme is in keeping with Cool Aid’s Guiding Principle, “We take responsibility for our actions and learn from our experiences.” The majority of participants recognize that they are not where they want to be in regard to diversity, equity and inclusion, and most are eager to learn and make positive changes to improve the work environment for others.

2. UNEVEN ORGANIZATIONAL EXPANSION AND ITS IMPACTS

Note: Although this theme is not directly related to diversity and inclusion, it is important to include because it does pose a significant challenge to the implementation of Cool Aid’s goals, values and the recommendations found in this report.

Participants described the impact of significant growth in the number of housing sites Cool Aid operates. This was described as causing strain or growing pains within the organization. A common perspective was that while housing sites have been greatly expanding, growth in Cool Aid services, organizational systems, and investments in personnel and staffing have not kept pace. The perceived impact of this was frequently described as not having adequate processes and policies for an organization of its size (particularly related to training and Human Resources capacity), and personal strain on staff, many of whom described their colleagues as “burnt-out”. Staff burnout was also described as being exacerbated by concurrent calamities of the opioid crisis and Covid-19 pandemic- both of which have added to the emotional fatigue associated with staff’s day-to-day work.

“We are constantly adding new buildings and services – but growth has outpaced actually reviewing the organization’s structure to ensure it’s still effective.”

“Staff are very tired and not well, you can see the cracks. That has been the case since the opioid crisis. It is hard to ask people to do more . That is the barrier to doing anything about [diversity/inclusion/anti-racism]. New staff that come on board have energy, and they eventually find that the demands are too high, and the support is not there for change.”.

“How can we make time to learn [about diversity/inclusion/anti-racism] when we barely have time to learn the core requirements of our roles?”

“You can’t champion anti-racism when you just want to close your eyes and get through the day.”

Frontline staff in particular described feelings of not having the control and/or support they need to succeed in very emotionally demanding roles. Seeming lack of engagement from their team leads, managers and teammates was often described as something that made them feel isolated or unsupported in their work. This experience did vary

somewhat from site to site and manager to manager, with some staff saying they had very engaged and supportive managers. However, this feeling of isolation is a significant barrier to Cool Aid's goals of organizational change (becoming more diverse and inclusive, anti-racist, decolonized, etc.).

"When you are coming in, there can be an element of not feeling like you are part of the team- Feeling excluded."

"Even prior to Covid- there weren't many events to bring staff together or even co-worker engagement."

"I wish they would listen to us a bit more."

"Management needs to listen rather than leading from the top down. Use their position to support people."

Cool Aid's Respectful Workplace Policy defines a respectful workplace as one where "Everyone has a sense of belonging". Several factors contribute to a sense of isolation among staff including overnight shift work, single-staffed sites, and cancelation of in-person events because of Covid-19. Staff's feelings of isolation impact how they experience their workplace including how connected and supported they feel towards it. It also makes organizational change more difficult.

3. AMBIGUITY/UNCERTAINTY OF ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND INITIATIVES

When asked to describe Cool Aid's organizational culture, most felt that Cool Aid did not have a single, unified organizational ethos. Instead, participants often described Cool Aid as "siloed" (i.e., without significant communication or collaboration between different housing sites, shelters, or areas of the organization). Many also felt that the application and interpretation of rules, policies and procedures varied significantly from site to site or manager to manager. This provided a depiction of Cool Aid's operating culture as inconsistent. As a result, there is variability in the staff experience.

"It's hard to describe Cool Aid as a whole...There are different pockets of culture."

"The different buildings all have different ways of running the show."

"Inconsistent – every facility, manager has a totally different culture... some are great, some are bad."

"[Organizational culture] differs from facility to facility and manager to manager."

"It is a common thing that if a manager is okay with a behavior, then it isn't dealt with."

Many participants expressed a lack of clarity about Cool Aid's goals regarding diversity. Many feel Cool Aid has not been clear and specific on what terms like diversity, anti-racism, decolonization and indigenization mean to the organization, or the specific actions that are being taken to support them.

"I don't know what indigenization, diversity, inclusion means to me. I don't think we know as an organization."

“We have talked about decolonization, indigenization, anti-racism, we aren’t clear on what it all means and what actions are required.”

“We really don’t have a good handle on our shared approach. It is not clear what we are trying to do and how we get there.”

“We need clearly articulated values and how to embody them in practice.”

“Seems in the last 5-6 years there has been a real push for diversity, inclusion, indigenization, but very little action. I think it is because we don’t even know what those terms mean. How can we implement action when we aren’t clear on where we want to go?”

“There is a lack of understanding about our shared philosophical approach. We don’t know what it means to embody an approach that embraces diversity.”

In the apparent absence of organizational values and goals that are specific and measurable, participants described a feeling of listlessness regarding this issue, i.e., that diversity, anti-racism and indigenization initiatives at Cool Aid constitute lip service without real action.

Many participants expressed concern that Cool Aid’s organizational efforts on diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism and decolonization, as well as indigenization, were tokenistic. Participants expressed a strong desire to see more substantive change within the organization, and to see these initiatives actioned. Commonly cited areas where participants feel real action needs to be taken relate to policy, funding and resources, training, and importantly through implementation and follow through by managers and team leads.

“I have concerns about diversity being a window dressing.”

“This “Indigenization” effort feels like it’s ticking a box. It doesn’t feel sincere.”

“There is a lot of lip service and tokenization. We need a clear plan to follow through on.”

“I would like Cool Aid to take a step back and make more systematic change.”

“This isn’t being championed by anyone below the CEO level. Leadership is not doing anything to move from talk to action.”

“We need the manager level to buy-in. They have the most influence on how work is done on the ground, yet there’s no visible or meaningful support provided for mid-level managers.”

A lack of clarity around Cool Aid’s goals and initiatives is felt to be contributing to inconsistency within the organization. It is notable that while Cool Aid has expressed a desire to decolonize, to be a truly diverse, inclusive, anti-racist organization and to indigenize itself – aside from diversity (which is addressed in the “Pilot Process for Review and Discussion”) - these terms are not addressed or defined in Cool Aid’s policies. This leaves many staff wondering what Cool Aid means when it says it is working towards these goals, and what decolonization, indigenization, inclusion and anti-racism look like in practice, and in the context of Cool Aid’s mission and vision.

INDIGENIZATION

"[Indigenization]... doesn't feel appropriate. It feels odd for an organization of mostly white people to be talking about indigenizing... what does that look like? who is leading that? Can we indigenize from our perspective?"

Specific to Cool Aid's goals on indigenization, many participants (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) expressed that while Cool Aid has taken on several initiatives to better serve their First Nations' clients and tenants and reflect Indigenous perspectives, in many ways they do not feel that Indigenous cultures and perspectives are understood and respected across the organization. Examples provided include:

- Tendency towards Pan-Indigenous (generic) information, symbols and teachings, rather than recognising the cultural diversity of Indigenous Nations, or being territorially appropriate;
- Incidents where First Nations Elders or their stories were not treated with adequate respect causing hurt and offense;
- Failing to explore and acknowledge Cool Aid's own history and relationship to colonialism and colonial violence;
- Mispronouncing First Nations names;
- Inadequate resources and staff for Indigenous services/programing; and
- Individual staff displaying active resistance to Indigenous Cultural Sensitivity Training.

This group of participants share a sense that it may be disingenuous for Cool Aid to attempt to indigenize the organization, before adequate work has done with respect to decolonization. Indeed, a mainly white organization lacks the internal resources to appropriately decolonize and indigenize and attempts to do so while a white/euro-centric culture is still firmly in place may result in some of the painful dynamics described above. It was Sarah Robinson's intention to recommend that Cool Aid focus its efforts on anti-racism and decolonization. This approach is characterized by undoing colonial practices and racial hierarchies, examining the presence of unconscious euro-centric values in the organization, and replacing them with responsibility to earth/place and accountability to community.

4. LACK OF DIVERSITY AMONG STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

On the topic of diversity in the organization, many participants noted that Cool Aid's staff composition remains largely Caucasian. It was expressed that while the population that Cool Aid serves is ethnically and culturally diverse, staff, and particularly leaders in the organization, do not reflect the diversity of the population they serve. While some proposed that Cool Aid's largely Caucasian and cis-gendered staff composition was reflective of a lack of diversity in Victoria more generally, most expressed that this homogeneity was a hinderance to the organization's goals in regards to diversity, equity, inclusion and indigenization. Some expressed concerns that this made Cool Aid unattractive to prospective BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ staff, and made it uncomfortable for existing BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+

staff (i.e., not having a peer group, feeling their perspective is unacknowledged or unrepresented, or having the burden of being asked to represent their communities).

"The people in this organization are predominantly white."

"Staff are not reflective of the people that they are serving."

"It is common for there to be diverse people at a lower level, and not the upper level."

"Management is mostly white, that is a problem when diversity issues arise."

"I think that the employee base of Cool Aid is reflective of Victoria, but not Cool Aid clients."

"Our teams are so white; how can we be inclusive and learn when we don't have diversity?"

"Lots of upper and middle management are white, how do we know how to support people who aren't?"

These impressions are in contrast to one of Cool Aid's guiding principles being, "To embrace diversity and honour all cultures, identities and experiences,"

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

People naturally look for connection and a sense of belonging in all aspects of their lives. Prospective leaders and staff seek to engage in their work in a space where they feel that they could connect, be themselves and meaningfully contribute from their own perspectives without discomfort. When an institution is predominantly white, hetero-normative, and middle class it does not present as a space where difference would be welcome and included. Participants similarly stated:

"This is not a workplace that diverse people want to come and work at. There are so few POC working with us, they don't have a peer group, their white colleagues don't know how to deal with those [racist] situations - sometimes staff are being the perpetrators of that too".

"How are we supposed to attract people who are different when everyone is white?"

"The hiring process is a barrier to diversity; the questions and competencies are geared towards middle class white people."

In addition to concerns that Cool Aid was not an attractive environment for prospective staff from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, some participants shared their impression that Cool Aid does not have a workplace culture where staff of diverse backgrounds feel personally comfortable, and therefore struggle to thrive professionally. A few participants shared their observation that BIPOC and transgender staff don't seem to stay in their positions as long as their white and/ or cis-gendered colleagues.

"We can hire people, but what do we do to make it a comfortable place for that person to work?"

"In a better environment [they] would have been here for years."

[Describing a staff member that is targeted with bigotry from clients] "I don't think they feel unsupported, but I think they feel alone."

"We have so little diversity in this organization that it puts an unfair burden on people who are different. [They get] all the questions, intense emotional labour."

"We have very little diversity so people of color are looked to as teachers."

"Trans people don't last in this job."

"People of color turn over faster and leave the organization."

The Respectful Workplace Policy defines a respectful workplace as one where "Everyone has a sense of belonging". While we have already identified that feelings of isolation or disconnection are common among staff, it may be that this feeling is exacerbated among staff whose ethnic, cultural identity or gender expression might differ from the dominant group.

Predominantly white institutions do not have to be explicitly racist or bigoted to create an environment that is a barrier to diversity and inclusion. The fact that white/euro-centric culture permeates the language, traditions and learning requirements is itself a sufficient barrier. While leadership and staff may arrive with diverse identities and worldviews, they may find they must work within the dominant one. When the dominant worldview is considered the norm, the effect of that is to diminish other ways of being in the world which can foster a culture of exclusion. Moreover, it can generate a breeding ground for resistance to equity and diversity.

RESISTANCE AND DEFENSIVENESS TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

While the vast majority of participants expressed support for Cool Aid's initiatives in regard to diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, decolonization and indigenization, a small number of participants we spoke to expressed resistance to these initiatives. A common critique among this group was that such initiatives put too much emphasis on race divisions, and that they would prefer not to discuss race at all. A few participants described their reactions to the tone of the conversation around racial justice (mostly in the public sphere, but sometimes also within Cool Aid) which they felt was at times needlessly disparaging to white people, and served to diminish their individual humanity. A small number of these participants characterized Cool Aid's diversity, equity and inclusion and related initiatives as being part of a progressive political agenda, which they felt was inappropriate for the workplace. Some feared that these initiatives signaled Cool Aid's hostility and prejudice against staff with conservative political views. While these views were in the significant minority among participants we spoke to, it does serve as an obstacle to change in this area.

Resistance to change can be understood as the act of opposing or struggling with modification or transformation that alters the status quo in an organization. Resistance can take many forms; it can be overt and displayed as open opposition, and it can be less obvious. For instance, people may question a methodology, while not explicitly resisting it but nonetheless undermining the process. Resistance may also be demonstrated by declaring oneself "too busy" to engage in change given the demands of day-to-day operations.

Similarly, many interviewees described the defensive responses of some of their colleagues as a significant obstacle to Cool Aid achieving its organizational goals.

"I sense there is a huge fear in the organization in talking about these issues."

"There is unconscious resistance to diversity and inclusion. Cool Aid staff members are extremely culturally insensitive".

Another commonly identified issue was the perception that there are a small number of staff with overtly prejudiced or racist views. Despite being reported as a small minority of staff, participants expressed that hearing such views, (whether conveyed at work or outside work), had a negative impact on them personally, including a reduced sense of comfort and safety in the workplace, which in turn diminished their assessment of Cool Aid as an organization. Among those who shared this view, it was also commonly felt that managers and team leads are resistant to addressing this behavior, particularly when it comes from long-serving employees.

"I have definitely worked with some racist people at Cool Aid."

"I know that there are staff that have prejudicial views – it doesn't get addressed until there is an issue."

"It's hard for people of colour to see racist things posted on their colleague's social media pages (e.g., "white lives matter") and then share a workplace with them. How are you supposed to focus on your job when you know the person next to you doesn't support your existence?"

"There are 'legacy staff' who have been there forever who can get away with anything. Sexism, racism, you name it. [Leaders] know and just don't act on it. There are many allowances for things because of the length of time people have been in their positions."

One of Cool Aid's Guiding Principles is to, "Foster an environment that promotes equity, well-being and safety for all". While any large workplace is likely to face individual behaviors which challenge and/or contradict their organizational values, the key is how the organization and its leaders (directors, managers, team leads) respond. According to the Respectful Workplace Policy, the role of Managers and Supervisors is to, "recognize and address actions that offend, embarrass or humiliate others, whether deliberate or unintentional", and to, "Treat each situation as serious."

A predominantly white institution is mainly exposed and habituated to the dominant paradigm, making substantive recognition and inclusion of difference, and sensitivity to diverse perspectives more difficult. This creates an environment that is more susceptible to microaggressions.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Some staff who are transgender, Black, Indigenous, POC and/or have an accent and/or different cultural background described being subject to microaggressions by their fellow staff that at times leave them feeling excluded/'othered' or frustrated/ exhausted. Other participants mentioned that they often notice their minority colleagues being subject to inappropriate or insensitive comments, and questions. Microaggressions are commonplace indignities that (whether intentional or not) communicate the 'otherness' of the subject, put them down, or put them in a more

“burdened” position. While these actions are small and often go unnoticed by those around, they are often routine, and their impact is generally culminative.

“We have very little diversity, so people of colour are looked to as teachers [related to their identity]. It’s too much emotional energy for one person.”

“I [notice] lots of not pronouncing people’s names properly – not making an effort to pronounce people’s names correctly.”

“Staff with accents don’t receive as much patience. People need to listen carefully and thoughtfully. I’ve seen people get frustrated because someone’s accent is thick.”

“Staff did not use their proper pronouns.”

“There was joking about trans clients– treating their appearance as something to be joked about.”

“People commenting on the color of people’s skin. Meant as a compliment but so inappropriate.”

Under the Respectful Workplace Policy, all staff have a responsibility to “Treat others with respect”, and “Refrain from actions that offend, embarrass or humiliate others, whether deliberate or unintentional”. Furthermore, the Respectful Workplace Policy defines Discriminatory Harassment as, “unwelcome remarks, jokes or innuendos or taunting about a person’s racial or ethnic background, place or birth, gender, citizenship, ancestry or religion.”

Such behaviors are typically symptomatic of larger issues, namely, lack of diversity and lack of sensitivity to the perspectives and experiences of individuals whose identities vary from the dominant cultural norm. Microaggressions experienced by POC and 2SLGBTQ+ staff serve to amplify feelings of alienation and exclusion. For Cool Aid, the reported occurrence of these behaviors is significant given their negative impact on staff.

5. BIGOTED ABUSE FROM CLIENTS/TENANTS

The most frequently mentioned burden carried by frontline Cool Aid staff who are minorities, was being subjected to bigoted abuse from clients and tenants in the conduct of their work. All staff we spoke to demonstrated significant compassion for the clients and tenants they serve, and recognition that outbursts from clients are frequently symptoms of trauma, mental health and addictions issues common among this population. At the same time, this puts POC and 2SLGBTQ+ staff in a position of more regularly experiencing abuse that can be triggering in the moment or have a culminative effect over time.

“There is lots of incidents of [clients/tenants] being racist or bigoted towards staff.”

“There was a lot of outright racism from [clients/tenants].”

“There are [clients/tenants] that are bigots – there have been situations were [clients/tenants] will drink and become abusive towards staff – spout derogatory comments towards women and sometimes [POC].”

“I think we need to address racism and homophobia amongst [clients/tenants] and towards staff.”

"If a white employee gives instructions to [clients/tenants], they might scream some swear words at them. For a Black employee, they say "I'll blow your head off," or call that person a monkey, or use the N-word."

"[Clients/tenants] often go straight to a personal attack. It's just part of the job. For a person who's racialized, I can't imagine what it would be like to know that experiencing racism is literally just part of your job."

Regarding the issue of client/tenant verbal abuse, a frequently mentioned perspective was how Cool Aid's values around providing low-barrier services, and trauma-informed care for clients/tenants may have the unintended consequence of creating a culture that is tolerant of verbal abuse towards staff. This includes verbal abuse which may be racist, or bigoted towards 2SLGBTQ+ and/or women. Some participants felt that there is an underlying culture of 'sucking it up' in the organization, and feeling that their concerns around verbal abuse are often minimized.

"Staff are on the receiving end of a lot of abuse and they are just expected to take it...They are expected to suck it up."

"You are supposed to just receive it stoically."

"There is an attitude and expectation of rolling with the punches...that's what it means to be 'cool' at Cool Aid."

"We mistake 'meeting clients where they are' with letting behavior slide."

"Staff wellbeing is sacrificed for accessibility for clients."

Many participants felt the impact of this passivity to verbal abuse from clients/tenants is that racist and bigoted behaviour directed at POC and 2SLGBTQ+ staff is not treated as serious by fellow staff, team leads or managers. It was described as being rarely addressed in the moment, infrequently documented, and seldom followed-up on with the client/tenant. In many cases, POC and 2SLGBTQ+ staff feel as if they are left to bare the emotional impact of this abusive treatment without support, or in some situations, with inconsistent support.

"The threat of physical violence and sexual violence is [what gets treated seriously]...Racism is not viewed as serious – I think that is because there are very few BIPOC staff so the issue doesn't get recognized; it's not affecting that many people and it is probably mostly happening overnight..."

"We are less vigilant about racism...The consequences [for clients/tenants] aren't there."

"In the moment if that's their reaction that is fine, but even with trauma informed care, if there is no follow up there is no growth and there are no standards for how staff should be treated."

"There isn't consistent enough follow-up from middle management."

"I wanted them to reinforce rules around verbal abuse to staff."

"We must check up on each other, especially after a person experiences an incident of racism or discrimination. You can see your team member has been targeted, so document. That person isn't in the right frame of mind. If you're unsure of the details, get them. Get the person a glass of water, give them a...pat on the shoulder. We may not have control over what the tenants and guests do, but if it's logged that tenant has to be held accountable."

As previously mentioned, one of Cool Aid’s Guiding Principles is that “We foster an environment that promotes equity, well-being and safety for all”. At the same time, participants expressed that verbal abuse from clients/tenants is a nuanced issue that requires careful consideration. While there is a strong desire for a consistently enforced standard regarding verbal abuse of staff, there is also a recognition that Cool Aid works with a vulnerable population. There is fear – and associated risk - that enforcing standards to address verbal abuse may cause tenants to lose their housing. This fear will need to be addressed in order for any solution to be viable.

Beyond the question of policy enforcement with clients/tenants, participants also expressed the importance of demonstrating personal support for staff who are on the receiving end of this type of abusive behaviour. Rather than ignoring or minimizing verbal abuse from clients/tenants, it was suggested staff and leaders can intervene to provide support; both in the moment (intervening to end the negative interaction), and following up with the target afterwards.

6. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

In speaking to Cool Aid staff, particularly those in frontline positions, the common narrative we heard was that providing essential low barrier shelter, housing and services for vulnerable populations is emotionally trying work. The emotional toll of the work is exacerbated by several factors including the Covid-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis, and the period of rapid growth in Cool Aid’s housing sites which contribute additional stress on organizational systems and staff. In an environment and period of heightened emotional arousal among staff, it is imperative that dispute resolution systems are operating effectively to quickly resolve inter-personal issues and address inappropriate behavior before it escalates and further impacts the team. The understanding from participants we spoke to is that this is not always the case.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN COOL AID

Conflict is normal and can even be healthy in an organization if addressed appropriately. A consistent theme heard from many participants was the perception that conflict and disputes (be they interpersonal conflict between staff or managers, or accusations of inappropriate conduct) were often not being addressed or resolved. Most participants described not being aware of what the organization’s dispute resolution process was, or what recourse they had if they didn’t feel like they could go to their manager with an issue. Additionally, many managers we spoke to described feeling ill-equipped to address some of the conflicts and issues that were being brought to their attention. This organizational tendency towards conflict avoidance presents itself as an aversion to discussing and addressing conflict and issues head-on, which has led many employees to feel unwelcome to raise problems and concerns because they doubt they will be addressed, or they fear that doing so will cause them to be labeled as difficult.

“I see that a lot here - approaches that people are using to solve their disputes are breaking down relationships rather than building relationships and causing a deterioration of trust.”

“We need a better way to address issues when they arise. Often things are raised and not followed up on. I think it’s because people don’t know what to do.”

“These individuals didn’t feel like they would get resolution through Cool Aid’s policies.”

“To me [the way they chose to raise the issue] was very telling that the internal dispute resolution mechanisms are not working.”

“People need to know what to do when something inappropriate occurs. We need to have a clear path to raise issues and have them dealt with.”

“I don’t feel like there is a space to have your voice heard without repercussion or causing a rift.”

“Managers here do not have conflict resolution skills.”

The Respectful Workplace Policy encourages employees to, “Raise disrespectful conduct with the employee displaying it or with a person in authority as soon as possible”. While the policy encourages staff to address issues one-on-one as early as possible, participants we spoke to expressed wanting more support in addressing issues with their peers. Similarly, according to the Respectful Workplace Policy the responsibilities of managers and supervisors is to, “Create an environment that supports the resolution of respectful workplace issues,” recognize respectful workplace issues when they arise, treat every situation as a serious matter and, “Manage the situation towards a resolution between the parties, if possible, with a view to correcting behaviour and preserving long-term working relationships.”

To effectively resolve workplace conflict, staff need clarity on the appropriate sequence of procedural options available to them if/when a respectful workplace incident occurs. Similarly, managers and supervisors need to demonstrate leadership in fostering an environment that supports the resolution of respectful workplace issues and may require training or additional support to do so effectively and consistently.

POLICY

Participants frequently mentioned being unfamiliar with Cool Aid’s Respectful Workplace Policy, and not knowing how it related to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism. We heard complaints that participants felt their direct superiors were not proactive in addressing inappropriate, disrespectful, and uncivil conduct that sometimes occurs in the workplace. They wish that there were more consistent and enforced standards of conduct across the organization, and that there was a clear, safe, and perhaps confidential place for them to go to make complaints and seek support if/when they experienced a respectful workplace related issue.

“We need clear standards of conduct for Cool Aid staff.”

“You can have empathy for people that have different views –At the same time, Cool Aid must have organizational standards.”

“We should have policies and procedures as it relates to racism and discrimination in the workplace.”

“There should be a clearly delineated person/place in HR where people can go to understand what their avenues are re: making complaints.”

“Create a Whistleblower Process.” [this was frequently mentioned]

“Staff need an atmosphere where [issues] can be aired/ a person that they can go to that they think people would understand them.”

“The respectful workplace policy is not clear enough, and is not used.”

In many of the comments cited above, participants were requesting new structural elements to complement Cool Aid’s Respectful Workplace Policy (e.g., create a whistleblower process). Most often what participants were requesting was a stronger and more consistent application of the existing policy. This might include clarifying acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the workplace, educating all staff on the policy and paths to resolution, and equipping staff with the skills to have difficult conversations with the goal of creating a better safer and more respectful work environment for everyone.

7. INDIGENOUS CULTURAL ADVISOR AND MANAGER, INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT POSITIONS

A major impetus for this audit was a desire to review and reconsider the role of The Indigenous Cultural Advisor / Manager, Indigenous Education and Program Development positions (ICA/MIEPD). These positions were viewed as being central to Cool Aid’s Indigenization initiative, however, the departure of the first two staff to hold these positions in short succession indicated issues with the role(s) and how it was conceived. Participants with insights on this position felt that an impediment to the success of the ICA/MIEPD was the ambiguity of Cool Aid’s goals and initiatives with respect to decolonization and indigenization. In the absence of well-defined goals for this role and the organization that were specific, measurable and attainable (as well as support from all levels of leadership), the sense was that it was one person’s job to decolonize and indigenize the whole organization. Furthermore, while many staff reported positive experiences with the mandatory Indigenous Cultural Sensitivity Training, it was mentioned that the significant teaching role performed by the ICA/MIEPD put them in contact with staff who were resistant and sometimes hostile to the content of the training. Participants felt that for the Indigenous people in these roles, that push-back was difficult and emotionally draining. Participants felt that a systematic re-consideration of this role and what it is aiming to achieve is necessary.

“There was intention to do the right thing, without knowing how to do that. The workload was not realistic.”

“We tasked one individual with trying to transform a whole organization— you can’t have a resource of one. That was very short sighted of us.”

“Shouldn’t have one person tasked with leading these things...It is draining because they are giving a lot of themselves. It’s emotional.”

“I would love to see them scrap the [ICA/MIEPD] position – It’s not working. Take a step back and consider what you are actually trying to achieve and make systematic change.”

“It shouldn’t be one person in this role. It should be a team of people collaborating about BIPOC programming, 2SLGBTQ+ programming, etc.”

“We asked a lot [of the role]. That one person basically stood alone, and [burned out] quickly because the rest of the organization wasn’t on board. It was difficult to know how to support them.”

“Cool Aid must clarify why we’re hiring for that role. Is it to understand more about colonization and build education? Is it because we’re living and working on Indigenous lands that our ancestors are responsible for taking away? Why do we acknowledge it? Because its politically correct, or because we actually believe it?”

It is notable that in describing challenges faced by the ICA/MIEPD, participants echoed many of the themes already described in this report. This includes, staff resistance and defensiveness (especially in regards to training), ambiguity/uncertainty of organizational goals and initiatives, as well as experiences that participants felt signaled the privileging of western cultural values and perspectives over Indigenous cultural values and perspectives.

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this audit was to assess Cool Aid’s diversity, equity and inclusion culture and recommend a course of action for positive change and leadership in these areas. The audit team conducted interviews-conversations and received written submissions from roughly a third of Cool Aid Staff and a few former staff. Based on what was heard, there is a strong desire for Cool Aid to be a truly equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace for all staff, but presently those intentions are being hindered by several factors or have yet to be actioned and implemented. The audit team concluded that staff and leaders in the organization have good intentions, despite those intentions not yet having been realized through meaningful action on the ground.

Staff from diverse backgrounds (particularly staff who are Black, Indigenous, POC and/or 2SLGBTQ+) more frequently reported feeling isolated, sometimes being subject to bigotry or demeaning comments/questions in the course of their work, and feeling inadequately supported in addressing these issues. These are issues that many organizations and the broader Canadian society have been contending with, and events and social movements of the past few years have made the need for change more urgently felt. To lead meaningful change at the organizational level takes significant clarity, consistency, investment and time.

CLARITY - To become a leader on diversity, equity and inclusion, and for organizational culture to be a point of pride for staff, Cool Aid must get clear on what future state they are trying to achieve, and why. It is this vision that must drive targeted goals and objectives. Terms like anti-racist, decolonization and inclusion must have a shared meaning within Cool Aid. Organizational policies must support these goals and objectives, and progress should be regularly measured and evaluated.

CONSISTENCY - Cool Aid’s vision, goals and objectives must be clearly communicated at all levels of the organization, at all sites and by leaders and staff alike. They must become a lens through which all actions are measured. Policy must be supportive of these objectives, and must be implemented consistently across the organization, at all levels. While these objectives are commendable, it is also to be expected that not everyone within the organization will support change. Cool Aid must be willing to continue doing the work and persist in the face of resistance.

INVESTMENT – Change is resource intensive. It requires additional support, external expertise and critically, the time and attention of staff and leaders. Implementing desired change requires a commitment to adequately resource this change through investments in key initiatives, leaders, groups and standardized training across the organization. It requires that the objectives are prioritized on a fundamental level.

We hope that the following recommendations can help inform the next steps Cool Aid takes as it continues to embark on the significant work required to bring about meaningful organizational change.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered as ideas and strategies to address the main themes (and underlying interests and values) that were identified during the audit. They are deliberately procedural in nature and are intended to inform the development of an action plan. The work-tasks required to formalize the action plan and implement the recommendations should be considered by the appropriate authorities while making best efforts to engage and involve staff.

1. ESTABLISH CLARITY AND CONCRETENESS ON WHAT THE ORGANIZATION IS TRYING TO DO AND WHY (I.E., WHAT IS ITS CORE MISSION AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES).

Get specific on what future state Cool Aid wants to achieve for the organization, and why this is important. Decide on working definitions of anti-racism, decolonization, diversity and inclusion (and perhaps, indigenization). Invite input from staff, specifically encouraging the participation of staff who are Indigenous, Black, POC, or members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

- *Communicate these clearly to the entire organization and consider holding information sessions to encourage dialogue and input from the workplace community.*
- *Create specific strategic goals, accompanied by concrete actions and timelines.*
- *Incorporate those goals and actions into the larger strategic plan.*
- *Report quarterly on progress towards those goals and actions taken.*

2. RETAIN THE SERVICES OF AN EXTERNAL CONSULTANT (QUALIFIED RESOURCE) TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DECOLONIZATION AND ANTI-RACISM INITIATIVES AND RELATED PROJECTS.

It is important that Cool Aid have guidance and support from experts with lived experience and Indigenous knowledge through the process of decolonization and developing anti-racist policies. The audit team was positioned to provide this support, but because of the loss of Sarah Robinson, it is no longer appropriate that we do so.

The previous position of ICA/MIEPD, while well intentioned, was not adequately resourced or supported in the role. An external consultant can guide and support the development of Cool Aid’s decolonization and anti-racism system, without the additional burden of being internal to the organization. Once Cool Aid is better positioned to re-establish an internal role (i.e., colonial systems addressed and anti-racist systems in place), it is recommended that this role be two people, or a small team, as opposed to one.

3. IMPLEMENT A TARGETED HIRING STRATEGY WITH ASSOCIATED BEST PRACTICES TO ENHANCE EMPLOYEE DIVERSITY AND PROMOTE INCLUSION.

In order for Cool Aid to truly enact the espoused values of fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace, it must commit to actively recruiting and hiring a more diverse staff and leadership team. It is important for the organization to employ all mechanisms available to hire, promote, and retain diverse talent, including the following:

- *Engage in preferential hiring.*
- *Build an understanding of the pipeline of diverse talent.*
- *Develop targeted efforts to build relationships with diverse candidates.*
- *Evaluation of candidates should be centered on values. Conduct interviews with more open questions. Consideration of lived experiences and perspectives that could be added to the team.*
- *Create mentorship opportunities for staff from diverse backgrounds to access opportunities for skill development and networking that will create pathways for staff from diverse backgrounds to be promoted to leadership positions.*
- *Review and update human resources policies and protocols in regard to recruitment and hiring (see recommendation #7 – Policy Review and Implementation).*

Committing to diversity hiring is a contentious issue and often produces threat responses and “push back” from the majority community. In order to address likely resistance on diversity hiring, it is recommended the organization implement the following:

- *Share Information and lead discussion on the organizational benefits of diversity. This may involve leveraging recent research to educate leaders and staff about the importance of diversity in enriching the workplace, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and better serving clients and tenants.*
- *Strongly communicate that diversity hiring represents the interests not only of the organization, but the entire community of Cool Aid. Investing in organizational diversity is foundational to expressing the larger institution’s core values of inclusion and service.*

4. USE THE VALUES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO PROMOTE AND BRAND COOL AID’S ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY.

Make Cool Aid's values and efforts on diversity and inclusion more visible, to communicate the expectations of the space, and in order to give people permission to be different and grant them agency to express themselves and be who they are.

- *Review the organization's website and ensure that the images used include people with diverse backgrounds (individuals who identify as Indigenous, people from racial, ethnic or linguistic minority groups, people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ and people with disabilities).*
- *Ensure that all internal and external communications include a clear statement of Cool Aid values in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion. Include Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, 2SLGBTQ+ and underrepresented people in the drafting of this statement.*
- *Increase signage throughout Cool Aid sites that depicts openness and acceptance of different identities, and communicates the expectations of an inclusive space.*
- *Respond publicly on social media platforms to issues that impact individuals who identify as Indigenous, people from racial, ethnic or linguistic minority groups, 2SLGBTQ+ folks and people with disabilities.*

5. CREATE ON-GOING FORUMS FOR DIALOGUE ON ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Prioritize creating opportunities for dialogue and information sharing around issues of diversity and inclusion. These could take different forms and should be suited to fit different needs, such as team debriefs, collaboration between different sites/ areas of the organization, staff feedback, as well as training/professional development. This would also need to be inclusive of staff that often feel left out of opportunities to connect with their colleagues and leaders: overnight staff, casual staff, and those that work at single staff sites.

- *Facilitate community discussions about diversity and inclusion issues, where it is established as a safe space to ask questions without being judged.*
- *Encourage and develop community of practise sessions where staff and leadership can meet to share experiences, techniques and approaches.*
- *Develop and facilitate these sessions with input and leadership from Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, 2SLGBTQ+ and underrepresented people within the organization. Ensure that the people who agree to take on these roles are adequately supported and recognize the additional labour that is required.*

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Cool Aid should strike a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee of DEI champions from all levels of the organization. The committee would work closely with the external consultant (Recommendation #2), to advise/direct the implementation of these recommendations, as well as Cool Aid's on-going work of decolonizing and becoming an anti-racist organization.

- *Committee members should be drawn from all levels of the organization.*

- *Scope, Mandate and Terms of Reference for the committee should be collaboratively determined by the committee itself, with the support of an external facilitator.*
- *The time commitment of members should be recognized, and where appropriate, compensated.*
- *The committee must have access to Cool Aid resources and decision making.*

6. IMPLEMENT STANDARDIZED TRAINING AND LEARNING FOR LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

Develop and implement standardized individual learning program for staff that educates on Cool Aid values, policies and protocols, particularly as they relate to diversity, equity and inclusion. Provide facilitated training and educational opportunities for leadership and staff that addresses cultural acumen, privilege, unconscious bias, impacts of colonialism, gender diversity, mental health and disability. Training opportunities should be fully endorsed by leadership and accessible to all staff. Trainings should include significant opportunities for reflection and dialogue among participants, as well as skill development. Training needs to be standardized/ mandatory across the organization, and it could involve aspects of independent learning, as well as forums for dialogue with colleagues. Areas for training opportunities include:

- *Conflict Resolution*
- *Cultural competency / working across cultures*
- *Bystander intervention*
- *Anti-racism and anti-oppression*
 - *White privilege/fragility/supremacy and the power/impact of whiteness*
 - *Equity vs equality*
 - *Gender Diversity 101 (pronouns, how people may present, do's and don'ts)*
- *History and impact of colonialism*

Two specific training areas that need to be attended to immediately are Respectful Workplace and Bystander Intervention. A respectful workplace curriculum needs to be developed and required for all positions in the organization. The training needs to include the policy, how complaints are handled and expectations around staff and client interactions that are disrespectful, racist or bigoted. The curriculum could incorporate some of the above training areas but should focus clearly on what the organization will tolerate and what it will not. Bystander Intervention should be featured in a prominent way to encourage staff and leaders to act when these behaviours are witnessed or experienced.

7. CONDUCT POLICY REVIEWS - AND IMPLEMENT REVISIONS AS REQUIRED - WITH RESPECT TO: *HIRING AND RECRUITMENT; CONFLICT RESOLUTION; VERBAL ABUSE FROM CLIENT/ TENANTS; AND NAME PROTOCOLS IN INTERNAL SYSTEMS/ SOFTWARE*

Conduct a review of HR policies through a diversity lens. Work in partnership with staff so everyone feels involved. Develop and revise HR practises with input and leadership from Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, 2SLGBTQ+ and underrepresented people within the organization. Ensure that the people who agree to take on these roles are adequately supported and recognize the additional labour that is required.

HIRING AND RECRUITMENT

Change human resource policies and protocols to recognize how colonial norms within the HR system have historically excluded Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, 2SLGBTQ+, and under-represented people. Recognize and prioritize different ways of knowing. Prioritize experience. Remove western academic requirements.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Along with training in Conflict Resolution, Cool Aid needs to assess how their complaints policy is operating and how it can incorporate other ways of handling conflicts. There is opportunity here to incorporate culturally appropriate ways of handling conflict and to enhance the cultural acumen of HR staff and leadership. In addition, the organization needs to address a gap in their policy around where complaints go when they are about senior Leadership or HR. Currently such complaints are being taken to the Board. As the Board is a Governance Board, not an Operational Board, this is not appropriate and does not adequately serve the individual raising the issue. Cool Aid should consider engaging an external body (Anonymous reporting line, Dispute Resolution Firm, Ombuds resource), to handle complaints when it is not appropriate to bring them to Human Resources.

VERBAL ABUSE FROM CLIENTS/ TENANTS

Cool Aid must immediately address the issue of inconsistent responses when staff are subject to bigoted verbal abuse from clients/ tenants. The existing policy must be reviewed, with consideration for how verbal abuse which may be racist, sexist or bigoted should be treated and followed up on given the impact that it has on staff wellbeing. Staff and managers must be accountable to enforcing the policy consistently at all housing and shelter sites. Staff should be trained to intervene in such interactions, both to end the negative interaction for the target, and provide support afterwards.

ADJUST NAME PROTOCOLS IN INTERNAL SYSTEMS/SOFTWARE

Issues in Cool Aid's existing HR and scheduling software must be immediately addressed to ensure that staff's chosen name is consistently used and 'deadnames' (i.e., a person's birth name before they changed it) is not used in Cool Aid systems. For transgender staff, the use of deadnames can be distressing and hurtful, and systems must be updated to ensure these are not present in staff profiles.